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ABSTRACT

Examining the role of service journalism in association magazines (magazines focusing on technical and educational information relating to specific practices of association members), a case study of the "Angus Journal" (a monthly magazine devoted to the beef breeding industry) investigated the problem of determining the amount of service content needed to involve readers, feature stories and personality profiles to add human interest, and association news to inform members about the organization. Based on focus group/personal interviews and concerns of the "Angus Journal" staff, a mail questionnaire was developed and distributed to a national sample of readers in the spring of 1987, with 513 readers responding. Results indicated that there was a definite hierarchy of reader preferences regarding magazine content. Service content, in the form of management information, had the highest reader preference. Also, although patterns of content preferences and actual readership were not uniform, findings showed that if an association member was a heavy reader of one type of content, he or she tended to be a heavy reader of other content types as well. (Five tables of data are included.) (MM)

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SERVICE JOURNALISM IN THE ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE: A CASE STUDY OF THE ANGUS JOURNAL

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ABSTRACT

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The service journalism function is extensive in thousands of association magazines that exist in this country. Quite often technical and educational information is featured in the hope that members will take specific action to adopt "new and improved" methods or techniques.

But every association magazine editor is faced with the problem of determining the right mix of service content needed to involve readers, feature stories and personality profiles to add human interest and association news to inform members about the organization.

This paper reports the results of an extensive readership study of the American Angus Association's publication, the Angus Journal, which was designed to help the staff create that mix. Specific research questions dealt with the readers' overall evaluations of the magazine and their degree of interest in service, human interest and association-related content. Data needed to answer the questions were collected from a national sample of 513 Angus Journal readers via a mail questionnaire in Spring, 1987.

The results show Angus Journal readers both prefer and read more service content than human interest or association-related content. However, the preferences and actual readership patterns are not uniform so specific "packaging" and writing strategies are suggested as ways for the editor to satisfy diverse information needs of the association members.

SERVICE JOURNALISM IN THE ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE: A CASE STUDY OF THE ANGUS JOURNAL

Clearly the majority of associations in our country exist to serve the interests of their members. And, as Cutlip et al. suggest in their analysis of these organizations, providing individual members with information designed to increase their involvement with association-sanctioned activities is a primary function of associations.[1]

Much of this information effort takes place in the pages of association magazines. For instance, quite often technical and educational information relating to specific practices of members is featured in these magazines in the hope that members will read it and then take specific action to adopt "new and improved" methods or techniques.

This "service journalism" function is extensive. One source estimates there are over 16,000 national and 400,000 regional, state and local associations.[2] But as Click and Baird note, it is difficult, if not impossible, to list the thousands of association magazines. They add, however, that these magazines range from very small publications edited on a kitchen table to very thick issues produced by well-paid staffers with lots of advertising revenue.[3]

However, in spite of this diversity in size and format, the editors of these publications face what Cutlip et al refer to as the "problem of serving many masters." These analysts say "the association. . . serves membership interests that may differ widely, shaped by regional influences, particular specialties

within a craft, or varying political, ethnic, or proprietary predispositions."[4]

Grunig and Hunt suggest this can put a lot of pressure on those responsible for communication in an association. They point out that members are highly autonomous and can join or drop the association at will because they are not constrained by a centralized or formalized structure. Consequently the communication program should be designed to get helpful information to members when they need it.[5]

For the association magazine editor this means providing content that is consistent with the service function of the association. But, while this is easy to say, the editor still faces the problem of deciding what type of service information should be included in the publication, which readers it should be directed to and how much of a role it should play in the overall editorial mix.

Cutlip et al say this can be a lengthy process because with associations, the needs of all members (some of which are more equal than others) must somehow be "synthesized, represented and weighed in decisions."[6]

An obvious solution would be for the magazine editor to look for guidance on how to answer these questions from prior research in the specialized magazine field. However, as Gerlach recently noted, there is very little published magazine research. He adds that of the few studies available most report results of research

on mass periodicals--rather than specialized publications such as association magazines.[7]

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of a research project designed to help answer these questions for a specific association magazine staff. However, the results have implications and ramifications for editors of other magazines who want to provide service articles to readers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The American Angus Association, headquartered in St. Joseph, Missouri, is the largest beef registry association in the world. It was founded over 100 years ago and more than 30,000 members. The association serves the Angus cattle breeder by maintaining breeding records as well as by marketing and advertising Angus beef. However, a major function of the association is assist individual breeders in managing their farm or ranch operation.

Association members subscribe to the Angus Journal, a monthly four-color magazine containing articles and editorial comment as well as breed and livestock advertising. In 1987, in an effort to improve communication with members, the American Angus Association decided to "take the pulse" of readers of the Angus Journal on a wide range of items and issues related to the association's communication program.

One of the specific areas of concern for the staff was the degree of interest on the part of readers in three major types of content: service content in the form of information designed to improve the skills of breeders in managing their operation

(information designed to increase their involvement with specific management activities), human interest information in the form of feature articles about members and association information in the form of reports on association activities.

Consequently, as part of a much larger study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the overall evaluation of the Angus Journal by readers.

2. What is the relative degree of interest on the part of readers in management/service content, human interest content and association-related content.

3. Are there demographic characteristics that can be associated with readers who prefer one type of content over the others.

In many ways, the above get to the heart of a major question in the mind of every association magazine editor: How can I satisfy the diverse information needs of my readers? Clearly, there are readers who primarily read the magazine for its service related content. Yet, the editor knows that in order to maintain readership a certain degree of human interest material must be presented---but how much? Further, as implied in the analysis by Cutlip et al, some members (not to mention the association staff) put a premium on news and information about the workings of the association itself. To paraphrase an old advertising line, "What's an editor to do?"

It's hoped that the information contained in the rest of this paper will help answer that question.

METHODOLOGY

As noted earlier, the effort to answer the research questions in this paper was part of a larger research study conducted by the Angus Journal in 1987. While a great deal of the information gathered in the study can be used to promote the magazine's value to advertisers, it was not designed to be a marketing study per se.[8] Instead, the results of this research are to be used by the Angus Journal staff to plan for the rest of 1980s and into the next decade.

The framework of the study called for both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative effort consisted of conducting focus group/personal interviews covering a wide range of topics with readers in the Fall of 1986. The issues that surfaced in the focus group/personal interviews, as well as issues of concern to the Angus Journal staff, served as the basis for developing questions to be used in a mail questionnaire distributed to a national sample of readers. While data were collected on over 150 different variables in this quantitative phase of the study, only results relevant to the research questions for this paper are reported here.

Because data obtained in the focus group/personal interviews indicated there may be regional content preferences, a stratified random sample was created from the 15,000 non-duplicated subscriber list. The "strata" were nine U.S. geographic regions. For instance, 14.8% of Angus Journal readers live in the Southeast. Consequently, 14.8% of the sample was made up of

readers from those states. This procedure increases the precision of the sample and allows for comparisons of responses by region at a later date.

Sample size was determined by the need to have an acceptable margin of sampling error. A sample of 500 has a maximum margin of error of 4.4% at a 95% confidence level and this was adopted as a goal. Past experience with other livestock publication sampling suggested a probable return rate of between 40% and 50%. This factor, plus the stratification process yielded a sample of 1,073 readers.

In January, 1987, a personalized letter from the editor of the Angus Journal was sent to all those selected to participate in the study. He provided background information both on the study and the researcher conducting the study. He further explained that all responses would be confidential--that no one at the Angus Journal or the American Angus Association would be able to identify a respondent's answers.

Questionnaires, along with a cover letter from the researcher, a return envelope and two "tokens of appreciation" (an Angus window decal and bumper sticker) were mailed in February, 1987. This procedure yielded 513 completed questionnaires (48% return rate) from respondents whose geographic locations closely match the original sample strata.

Respondents were overwhelmingly male (90.7%) and middle-aged or older (30-39, 24.8%; 40-49, 20.2%; 50-59, 22.6%, and 60 or over 20.2%). They are well educated (high school graduates,

23.9%; college graduates, 28.2%, and college post-graduates, 17.6%) and manage a farm or ranch with a median of 25 head of registered cattle.

Data needed to answer the first research question were obtained by asking readers to respond to several "summary" measurement items. These included asking them what percentage of the Angus Journal articles and stories they generally read or look at each month and to give an overall evaluation of the Angus Journal compared to other livestock magazines with which they are familiar. For the latter question readers could respond on a five point scale from Excellent (5) to Poor (1).

Three different types of data were collected to answer the second research question, which dealt with the relative degree of reader interest in three types of content--service, human interest and association-related.

As noted above, service content for the Angus Journal most often means articles and information designed to involve readers with methods to improve their ranch or farm management techniques. Examples of this type of content include columns on how to use performance data (genetic information) to improve herd characteristics, how to use specific techniques to market and advertise cattle and how to improve pasture land. In most every case, readers are urged to take specific actions to implement these improved methods.

Human interest content most often consists of columns and features on farm and ranch life, features on young people and

profiles of individual breeders and the way they live. Association content consists of news about association sponsored activities, listings of new members and minutes of the board of directors.

The first type of data needed to answer the second research question consisted of Likert-type statements to which respondents could indicate their level of agreement-disagreement. (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Strongly Agree) One primary attitudinal item was identified for each type of content. In addition, three supplementary items that help "flesh out" a description of reader attitudes regarding these content categories were identified for each type.

Secondly, readers were given a series of dichotomous content types and asked to indicate a preference for one over the other. For instance, readers were asked to indicate whether they prefer "News about Association members," or "Management information."

Third, readers were given a complete list of the departments and sections currently available in the Angus Journal and asked to indicate how often they read each. Readers could respond on a four-point scale ranging from Always (4) to Never (1). Three departments or sections were identified as being representative of each content type and "scores" for these were compiled as a grand mean or "index" for each content category. T-tests between these index means then were used to determine a relative rank regarding readership of the different types of content.

Further, to discern relationships between readers' attitudes about the different types of content and their reading patterns, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the means for the attitudinal items and the readership indices.

Finally, to answer the third research question, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for the age, level of education and size of operation (as measured by the number of registered Angus) and the attitudinal items and readership indices for the three types of content.

RESULTS

Data needed to answer the first research question can be found by looking at the estimates by readers of the percentage of Angus Journal content generally read or looked at each month. This ranges from 2% to 99% with a mean of 71%. Further, nearly 50% (49.8%) of readers consider the Angus Journal to be "Excellent" compared to all other livestock publications with which they are familiar. An additional 40.3% rate it as "Good."

Data relevant to the second research question can be found in Tables 1-3. In Table 1 the key attitudinal item for each type of content is printed in bold. And, Table 1 shows readers want more management-related articles in the Angus Journal. This is in spite of the fact that respondents believe they have plenty of sources of information for management information. Further, respondents believe this management/service information should apply to a wide spectrum of readers--not just specific types of

breeders. In addition, readers do not believe management content has to be geographically related.

Table 1 also shows that human interest content does not have a high priority with readers. However, they do enjoy reading this type of content and find the information somewhat useful. Angus Journal readers do not, as some had suggested, read human interest profiles of other breeders to find flaws in their operations.

This table also shows that while readers believe it is important for the magazine to provide information about association members, to a good degree they are happy with the amount of information now being provided.

Table 2 shows that, when asked to make a choice, readers prefer management/service information over human interest and association-related content. Further, in this context, they prefer human interest material over association-related content.

This same pattern is reinforced in Table 3 which details the actual reading patterns of respondents for different sections and columns in the Angus Journal. T-tests between each of the index means are all significant at the .01 level. This indicates the differences between them are real and shows that respondents report reading more management/service articles than human interest and association-related content. Further, they attend to more human interest than association-related material.

Table 4 shows that correlating reader preferences and reading patterns with the summary measures of "amount read" and

"overall rating" indicates those who want more management information and those who read human interest information first are also most likely to read more of the publication. This analysis also reveals that the more satisfied a reader is with the amount of association information currently presented, the higher the overall rating of the Angus Journal.

Table 5 presents data needed to answer the third research question. Information contained here shows that the older readers both prefer and read more human interest and association-related material. Also readers with the larger Angus operations are more likely to both prefer more association information and read more of this information.

CONCLUSIONS

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from this study. All, of course, are important for the Angus Journal but most have implications for other association magazines as well.

First, it is clear that the Angus Journal is well thought of by its readers. The amount of content attended to by readers is very high and the fact that 90% of readers give it an"Excellent/Good" rating should be a source of pride for the staff and association.

A second conclusion, and a more far reaching one, is that there is a definite "hierarchy" of content to which the staff should be sensitive. Reader attitudes about types of content in the Angus Journal, reader preferences for one type of content

over another and reported reading patterns clearly indicate that "service" content in the form of management information has the highest priority.

Human interest content, such as feature stories and personalty profiles most often used by editors to enhance readership, are not what the majority of Angus Journal readers are seeking in the publication. Also, perhaps to the chagrin of those very active in the association, content dealing with association activities takes a back seat to the other types.

But in spite of the content hierarchy, a third conclusion from this study is that if a member is a heavy reader of one type of content--he or she is a heavy reader of the other types as well. Likewise, the more of the Angus Journal a member reads, the more likely he or she is to give the magazine a high overall rating.

However, a fourth and very important conclusion of this study qualifies the above somewhat. Specifically, it is clear that the patterns of content preferences and actual readership are not uniform. The older readers with larger Angus herds prefer and read more association and human interest content. It is the younger readers with the smaller operations that prefer and read the "service" content in the form of management information.

To a certain extent this is understandable. The older, more established readers with larger operations may have a lot of management resources at their disposal. It is the younger members, with less extensive operations and less extensive

resources, who rely on the Angus Journal to be their primary source of management information.

This is exactly the type of problem Cutlip et al were referring to when they noted associations have to "serve many masters." In this case, perhaps the older, more established members by virtue of their tenure in the association are in a better position to "put pressure" on the editor to provide more human interest and association related content. Yet, it is the bulk of the membership--the younger, less established ranchers--who can benefit most from the "service journalism" that the Angus Journal can provide.

In this case, given the benefit of the knowledge gained from this study, the Angus Journal staff can adopt some strategies that have implications for other service journalism publications as well.

Specifically, knowing that most readers prefer and read the management-related content, the staff can "package" the magazine to lead with this type of content. Then, recognizing the necessity to present association information, the staff can place this content so that it is readily available to interested readers but in a way that does not give it a prominent place in the publication.

As for human interest content, the Angus Journal staff can make a conscious decision to make their feature stories and personality profiles "hybrids." That is, this content can also incorporate management or association information in its

presentation. By doing this, the staff can use the human interest content as a "bridge" to reach those readers primarily interested in the other two types of content.

While the limitations of this study are such that many of the findings are restricted to the Angus Journal, these packaging and writing strategies may have utility for other magazines--both association and non-association--that have a major "service journalism" function.

NOTES

[1]Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center and Glen M. Broom, Effective Public Relations, 6th Edition, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), pp. 500-507.

[2]Ibid., p. 501.

[3]J. W. Click and Russell N. Baird, Magazine Editing and Production, 3rd Edition, (Dubuque: Wm C. Brown Company, 1983), p. 6.

[4]Cutlip, op. cit.

[5]James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt, Managing Public Relations, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984) p. 254.

[6]Cutlip, op. cit.

[7]Peter Gerlach, "Research About Magazines Appearing in Journalism Quarterly," Journalism Quarterly, 64: 178-182 (1987).

[8]For examples of more traditional magazine readership/marketing studies see: Bruce Garrison, "Reading About Today's Homes and Gardens: A Subscriber Profile of a New Magazine," and "The Upscale Hispanic Magazine Reader: Acculturation and the 'Yucca' Lifestyle." Papers presented to the Magazine Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, Texas, August 1987.

[9]Service/Human Interest $t=7.48$, $df=496$, $p<.01$
Service/Association $t=10.38$, $df=496$, $p<.01$
Human Interest/Association $t=4.11$, $df=493$, $p<.01$

TABLE 1
ANGUS JOURNAL READER ATTITUDES ABOUT MANAGEMENT, HUMAN INTEREST & ASSOCIATION CONTENT

	MEAN
MANAGEMENT ITEMS	
I am in favor of more management-related articles in the Angus Journal.	**4.2**
If I face a management problem in my operation, I have plenty of sources I can turn to for help and information.	3.6
Management articles should focus on problems of the purebred breeder rather than deal with general topics of beef husbandry (such as feeding, health, calving, etc.)	2.6
An article containing information on a farm or ranch management technique would have to relate specifically to my geographic location in order to be useful to me.	2.9
HUMAN INTEREST ITEMS	
When I get my copy of the Angus Journal, I read the human interest profiles of Angus breeders first.	**2.7**
I enjoy reading profiles of Angus breeders because they're lively and contain interesting photographs.	3.7
Since other breeders are potential competitors, I read profiles of them in order to find flaws in their programs.	2.1
Articles profiling other breeders are more entertaining than useful to me.	2.8

Continued on next page

TABLE 1 (Continued)

ASSOCIATION ITEMS	MEAN
The Angus Journal provides me with all the information I want regarding decisions of the American Angus Association board of directors.	3.4
If state associations curtail or cut back on their newsletters, it's even more important for the **Angus Journal** to contain state news and junior activities.	3.9
I always know where the American Angus Association and the **Angus Journal** stand on major issues facing the beef industry.	3.4
It is important for the **Angus Journal** to recognize the accomplishments of Angus people.	4.3

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

TABLE 2

ANGUS JOURNAL READER PREFERENCES FOR MANAGEMENT, HUMAN INTEREST & ASSOCIATION CONTENT

Prefer Management Information (73.5%)	Or	Prefer Historical Aspects of Angus (26.5%)
Prefer Management Information (73.8%)	Or	Prefer News About Association Members (26.2%)
Prefer Beef Husbandry Articles (75.7%)	Or	Prefer Human Interest Stories (24.3%)
Prefer Show and Sale Reports (63.3%)	Or	Prefer Human Interest Stories (36.7%)
Prefer Feature Stories (81.6%)	Or	Prefer Listings of New Members (18.4%)

TABLE 3
ANGUS JOURNAL READERSHIP PATTERNS OF MANAGEMENT, HUMAN INTEREST AND ASSOCIATION CONTENT

MANAGEMENT CONTENT	MEAN
"A Performance Report"	3.5
"Merchandising"	3.2
"The Grazier"	3.0
Management Content Index	**3.2**
HUMAN INTEREST CONTENT	
"Angus Farm and Fireside"	2.9
"The Next Generation"	2.9
"This Way We Live"	3.0
Human Interest Content Index	**3.0**
ASSOCIATION CONTENT	
"Association Highlights"	3.1
"New Members"	2.7
"Minutes of the Board of Directors"	2.7
Association Content Index	**2.8**

Scale: 1=Never Read, 2=Seldom Read, 3=Usually Read, 4=Always Read

TABLE 4
CORRELATIONS OF ANGUS JOURNAL READER ATTITUDES AND READING PATTERNS WITH SUMMARY MEASURES

	Amount Read	Overall Rating
Attitudes		
Management Item	.12*	.02
Human Interest Item	.14*	.04
Association Item	.07	.09*
Readership		
Management Content	.55**	.26**
Human Interest Content	.50**	.26**
Association Content	.53**	.31**

Pearson Correlation Coefficients *p<.05, **p<.01

TABLE 5
CORRELATIONS OF ANGUS JOURNAL READER ATTITUDES AND READERSHIP PATTERNS WITH DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

	Age	Education	Operation Size
Attitudes			
Management Item	-.04	.06	-.02
Human Interest Item	.08*	-.07	-.04
Association Item	.10*	-.07	-.10*
Readership			
Management Content	.08	.03	.00
Human Interest Cont.	.09*	-.06	.03
Association Content	.12*	.00	.12*

Pearson Correlation Coefficients *p<.05, **p<.01